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ABSTRACT

This study explored the extent of negative attitudes toward success among housewives by means of objective and projective tests. Since married women with families constitute the majority of women over 25, the authors found it important to determine how prevalent negative attitudes toward personal achievement in women were among them. Fifty-three married adult women comprised the sample group, with 30 of the women described as "activist" and 23 as nonactivist." Those women having a regular affiliation outside the home with a group promoting social change were termed "activist." The Inventory of Feminine Values was administered and evaluated for presence or absence of the motive to avoid success. Results indicated that despite the highly favorable attitudes toward self-actualization by the subjects, high levels of negative effect toward success in the more the more projective measures were also present. Contrary to the hypothesis, activism did not generally predict fear of success imagery, although activism did predict stronger self-orientation than did nonactivism. (Author/PC)

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Female Role Perception and Attitudes toward Competence as Related to Activism in Housewives

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To date, most studies of fear of success in women have looked at unmarried students (Horner, 1972). The present investigation was undertaken to explore the extent to which the "fear of success" syndrome can be found among non-working married women. Horner has suggested that fear of success motivation is aroused by fear of the social consequences of such success. Women appear to perceive that "male success" (personal achievement) and "female success" (establishment of a marriage and family) are incompatible. Hence, one could argue that women who have already achieved the "criteria of female success" -- marriage to a successful husband, a family, a comfortable financial and social position, etc., would be less apt to show fear of success imagery than female students since they no longer have any reason to fear the consequences of success. For these two reasons -- non-involvement in achievement activity and apparent success in the traditional feminine role -- housewives should show considerably lower fear of success than female students.

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Housewives, however, are not an undifferentiable mass. The present sample was composed of two subgroups of housewives, those involved in politically active organizations and those involved only in organizations centering around the church and/or children. Those involved in no organizations are exceedingly difficult to sample.

The present study differs from those of Horner and her associates in several other particulars. First, respondents were compared on an objective measure of feminine values as well as on a more projective procedure derived from those used by Horner (1972). An attempt was made to determine whether objective and subjective measures of attitudes toward and about women would demonstrate similar phenomena. The objective measure was the Inventory of Feminine Values devised by Anne

Steinmann and her colleagues (Steinmann and Fox, 1966). They have found that women in the professions tend to describe the ideal female as more self- as opposed to family-oriented than do female graduate students. In line with these results, it was hypothesized that women who were involved in social activism should show more self-orientation on the inventory than the "non-activists." Also, it was expected that women who had higher family-orientation scores on the inventory would be higher in fear of success than women who had high self-orientation scores regardless of their subgroup classification as activists. Thus, if the two methods are measuring the same or similar phenomena, socially activist housewives should have less fear of success than housewives with more traditional "kinder, kuche, and kirsche" interests.

Measures of attitudes toward male as well as female success were obtained from the female respondents. At the time of the present experiment, no direction of effect for attitudes toward male vs. female success was hypothesized. Male success leads were included as a control for attitude toward success in other individuals in general -- a control which appears to have been lacking in previous studies which have investigated fear of success in women.

In sum, this study was undertaken to explore the extent of negative attitudes toward success among housewives by means of both objective and projective measures. Since married women with families constitute the majority of all women over twenty-five, it is important to determine how prevalent negative attitudes toward personal achievement in women are among them.

Method

Subjects: The Ss were 53 married adult women, all of whom were between the ages of 25 and 50, white, college-educated, and economically middle or upper-middle class. Thirty women were described as "Activist" (A), having a regular affiliation outside the home with a group which promoted social change such as Women's

Strike for Peace, the New Democratic Coalition, environmental groups, etc. Twenty-three women were considered to be "Non-activist" (NA), having no known regular group involvement outside the home other than those involving either their religion or their children. Almost every S in both subgroups had pre-school or school-age children. Only five were engaged in any form of paid employment. All subjects were residents of one of two communities on the north shore of Long Island, Nassau County, New York.

Procedure: Questionnaires were mailed to 132 women, 66 in each of the two towns. In each town, half the women in the initial sample were classified as activists and half were not. The final sample of 53 represents those women who responded to the survey. There was no significant difference between the percentage of activists and non-activists who responded.

Each S received three items in addition to a covering letter: Form B of the Inventory of Feminine Value (Haferr Foundation; copyright, 1968), two descriptive statements of successful persons similar to those of Horner (1970) which the subject was asked to elaborate, and a biographical data sheet requesting information about her age, educational level, group affiliations, and vocational experience.

Ss were asked to describe the following two leads, counterbalancing the sex of lead across Ss:

"The novel (Carol, George) has written in (her, his) spare time was published two months ago and is already at the top of the best-seller list."

"(Carol, George) is a college professor and has just been named chairman of (her, his) department."

The Ss' responses were evaluated for presence or absence of the motive to avoid success according to the criteria listed by Scott (1958).

Results

As measured by the Inventory of Feminine Values, thirty-five subjects were

classified as self-oriented and eighteen as family-oriented. As hypothesized, activists were more self-oriented than non-activists ($t = 2.39$; d.f. = 51; $p < .05$).

Six of the subjects refused to respond to either of the success cues and two subjects omitted responding to one of the two success leads. Of the 92 descriptions given, fifty-seven (60%) were judged to include evidence of conflict or anxiety and thus, as showing fear of success imagery (interrater reliability: $\phi \bar{x} 1,2,3 = .82$; $p < .01$). Forty of the forty-seven subjects (85%) responding to this task produced at least one, and often two, descriptions containing fear of success imagery. These responses were about equally distributed by sex of lead (26 for female leads; 31 for male leads). However, a trend towards higher frequency of fear of success was found for the "novelist" (65%) for the "chairman" lead (35%), regardless of the sex of the lead ($\chi^2 = 3.21$; d.f. = 1; $p < .10$). Contrary to expectation, the same proportion of activist (58%) and non-activist (42%) women gave descriptions indicating fear of success ($\chi^2 = .06$; d.f. = 1; $p > .05$).

Table 1 contains a summary of the content of the descriptions of both leads, by sex, which were rated as showing evidence of conflict or fear of success. Consistent with the results of Hoffman (in press), the female leads elicited mainly themes of affiliative loss or social inadequacy.

TABLE 1

Summary of Content Associated with Ratings of Fear of Success by Occupation and Sex of Lead

	"Carol"	"George"
"Novelist"	unfeminine, unsuccessful in marriage, role conflict, unhappy n = 16	neurotic, atypical sexual behavior, exploitative n = 21
"Chairman"	chronologically older (than males, role conflict, rigid, pressured, humorless n = 10	dull, low self-esteem, poor, interpersonal skills, untalented n = 10

Descriptions of the male leads included both devaluation of the achievement, as Hoffman found, but also emphasis upon intrapsychic inadequacy.

Discussion

Surprisingly, despite the highly favorable attitudes toward self-actualization expressed by the subjects, they also showed high levels of negative affect toward success in the more projective measure. Almost nine out of ten respondents gave negative imagery to success leads. This figure matches the 84% of upper division college women who gave negative associations to projective success profiles (Horner, 1970). Although the role attitude measure differentiated between activist and non-activist women, both groups were equally and highly negative toward individuals who displayed clearly visible social competence. Even though they, themselves, were not involved in competitive, success-directed efforts, such efforts appear to be threatening and disturbing whatever the sex of the individual making the effort.

Contrary to the hypothesis, activism as defined by one or more community organizational commitments, did not generally predict fear of success imagery, although activism did predict stronger self-orientation than did non-activism. Role orientation failed to predict high and low fear of success imagery, as the majority of women in both groups produced conflicted responses to the success leads. Thus, women who are community-oriented in their behavior and self-oriented in their expressed values are as conflicted about success as women who choose to remain at home and express family-oriented values.

It is somewhat surprising that negative evaluations of successful individuals are on the whole distributed equally in terms of the sex of the lead. Although the content of the imagery differed depending on the sex of the successful individual, competitive life styles for either sex appear to be equally unattractive to these women. This finding is reminiscent of recent studies (Horner, 1970; Lunneborg & Rosenwood, 1972; Unger & Fishbein, 1973) which suggest

that people of both sexes are tending to value achievement needs less and affiliative needs more. Perhaps the term "hostility toward success" rather than fear of success motivation might be more appropriate now.

In general, these results do not support the hypotheses based upon Horner's theoretical model. Lack of recent experience of interpersonal competition and engagement in traditional feminine behaviors do not reduce fear of success motivation in women. High negative affect toward success is present in women who engage in socially activist life styles as well as in those with more traditional interests. Expressed self-orientation may not serve to decrease fear of success in these women. In fact, one might suggest that fear of success approaches being a universal phenomenon among women and that negative images of male success appear to be as common as negative images of female success.

Acceptance of these findings at face value suggests that, despite the focus on consciousness raising and greater opportunities for women in the past decade, women continue to be in conflict about achievement behavior and that this distress may be more independent of situational cues, such as college student status and even sex than has formerly been noted. These findings also suggest that widely published reports of changes in women's attitudes may be telling us less than previously thought. There appears to be considerable discrepancy between overt and covert measures. Changes in stated attitudes may only be "skin-deep."

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